
PRESS INFORMATION

From a small ferry to a cruise ship

100 years ago MEYER WERFT delivered the ferry for the route between Ditzum and Petkum - Around 60,000 passengers annually

Papenburg, 17.08.2026 Everything starts small, and that was also the case in Ditzum 100 years ago. On 15 August 1926, MEYER WERFT delivered a ferry for the route between Ditzum and Petkum.

The ferry, measuring 24 metres in length and just under 6 metres in width, entered service in the autumn of 1926. Since then, it has not only connected the two banks of the River Ems, crossing the river several times a day, but has also connected people. For many years, it was the only way for commuters to cross the river at this location, as the next ferry crossing was in Leer. For local residents, who used to refer to the ferry simply as the “Damper” because of its steam-powered propulsion system, it provided an indispensable service.

Over the years, the Ditzum-Petkum ferry has undergone numerous upgrades and modifications. Its steam engine has long since become part of history. What has remained, however, are its hull and its mission of bringing people together. In many ways, this also reflects a chapter of MEYER WERFT’s own corporate history. The construction of small ferries such as the Ditzum-Petkum gradually evolved into the building of ever larger and more sophisticated ferry vessels. During the 1970s and 1980s in particular, the shipyard constructed numerous ferries for international customers, including operators in Scandinavia and Indonesia. These projects laid the foundation for the passenger ships that followed and ultimately became an important stepping stone towards today’s cruise shipbuilding operations in Papenburg.

For this reason, despite its comparatively modest size by today’s standards, the Ditzum-Petkum ferry represents an important piece of the shipyard’s history. The extent of this development became evident in 1993 with the delivery of *Silja Europa*. At the time, she was regarded as the largest passenger ferry in the world and set new benchmarks with her size,

capacity, and innovative design. Looking at her profile today, more than three decades later, the vessel still appears remarkably modern. The Ditzum-Petkum ferry therefore stands as a symbol of the beginning of a journey that took MEYER WERFT from regional ferry projects to internationally renowned specialist shipbuilding.

Today, the ferry remains a popular link for cycling tourists travelling between Germany and the Netherlands, or vice versa. On average, around 60,000 passengers use the ferry each year. It is operated by the District of Leer. The 100th anniversary of the Ditzum-Petkum ferry will be celebrated on 3 October 2026, exactly one hundred years after it entered service.

Photo: Ems ferry during the conveyance of *Silver Ray*, April 2024.

Photo: Tourists enter the Ems ferry in Ditzum